ORAL HEALTH, NATURALLY

Homemade Toothpaste & Mouthwash Recipes

By Kirsten Anderberg

Oral Health, Naturally: Homemade Toothpaste and Mouthwash Recipes

Written by Kirsten Anderberg, Summer 2006 and January 2011

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Published by:

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Dedication

Dedicated to the hopes that someday there will be a universal dental care program for all.

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Introduction

Most Americans are used to buying everything necessary for oral hygiene in prefabricated, mass-produced packaging, but people all over the world, and in times past, have used natural toothbrushes and toothpastes made from plants growing around them. The precursor to the modern toothbrush was a twig and the first toothpastes were herbal powders with natural binders. Plants traditionally used for oral hygiene contain beneficial oils and properties for teeth, gums and the mouth. This article will explore different ways to take care of your teeth and mouth naturally, and is the culmination of 30 years of assimilated research on natural oral care by the author.

DISCLAIMER: Do not eat, drink, or use any plant medicinally, internally or externally, if you have not fully studied and identified the herbs properly. Please consult with your doctor and/or local alternative herbal care specialist before using herbs you are not familiar with. It is safest to buy organic herbs from a licensed seller such as Mountain Rose Herbs (www.mountainroseherbs.com). I wildcraft many of my own herbs for personal use but it is wise to find out the history of the land you wildcraft herbs on. One of the places I use is an abandoned organic herb farm and the owner allows me to forage amongst the weeds. I have found abundant nettles, comfrey, calendula, blackberry and other medicinal herbs for use from that overgrown and now unused area in a rural part of town. I tell you this as an example of safe foraging. It makes no sense to wildcraft herbs growing on toxic land as you bring the pollution home with you, so be aware of the health of the soil, not just the plants, that you use in and on your body. It is never wise to collect herbs from the side of the road, for example, as they are full of pollution from car exhaust. Be cautious of collecting herbs on public land in cities, as the area may have been sprayed with pesticides. Use your head, and again, the safest route is to buy herbs from a licensed herb store unless you have extensive backwoods training in herb identification and have knowledge of the history of the land the plants are growing on.

Chapter 1: Reasons to make your own oral hygiene products

1. Quality Control! Use fresh, organic ingredients, without any chemicals.
2. No Preservatives! Homemade cosmetics don't need long shelf lives.
3. Eco-Friendly! Reduce packaging by reusing bottles and jars.
4. Reduce Pollution! Though Tom's toothpaste sounds like it's made in Tom's backyard, I hear the Tom's factory in reality is an industrial eyesore. By making your own cosmetics, you eliminate the industrial pollution created by mass-marketed cosmetics.
5. Save Money! Pick wild herbs, or grow a medicinal herb garden yourself, then make your own tonics, and save!
6. Cultural History! Your grandmother made many of her own cosmetics, it is a lost Do-It-Yourself art. Ask her about it!

Chapter 2: Homemade Toothbrushes

In the now out-of-print 1972 book, "The Tooth Trip," by hippie dentist Thomas McGuire, D.D.S., the author speaks of three plants with "fairly good bristles," which make good natural toothbrushes. The three plants he mentions are Marshmallow, Alfalfa and Licorice Roots.

Marshmallow Toothbrushes: To make marshmallow root toothbrushes, he suggests you cut 5 inch long pieces of the root (pick straight sections), and then unravel or peel the two ends, like untwisting a rope. You then boil them with a few cinnamon sticks to flavor and soften them. Once they are tender, remove them carefully from the boiling water and soak them for 24 hours in brandy to dry and strengthen them. Then the roots are died in a warm oven or warm room. Once they are dried, you can bundle them together and attach them to a handle or just use them with your fingers. To use root brushes, you need to soak them a few minutes in warm water to soften them before you can use them, but then you can add toothpowder or paste and brush just as you would with a nylon bristle brush. Chewing on marshmallow roots is recommended for teething babies and people with raw or sore gums or mouths as the mucilage soothes the irritations, thus its use as a toothbrush can also offer some soothing effects.

Alfalfa Toothbrushes: To make alfalfa root toothbrushes, Dr. McGuire says you can take alfalfa roots that are thick around in diameter, and then strip off the outer skin or bark. Then you dry them slowly at room temperature. When the roots are dry, cut them into 3-5 inch pieces. Then hit each end with a hammer to break up the fibers and form a brush. Beat it only enough to make bristles. Then you can fold the roots in half and bundle them. Remember to soak them in warm water before using.

Licorice Root Toothbrushes: The last toothbrush McGuire suggests from natural fibers is made from licorice root. He says this one is especially good for tender and delicate gums, and from my own herbal knowledge, I can also tell you licorice root is helpful to digestion, and this toothbrush is already flavored! Select straight roots and cut 3-5 inch pieces, dry them by mild heat, then take off the outer layer of skin at each end. Fold the roots over in half, and bind to make a handle. The number of roots needed for a root brush varies with the size of the roots. As you can see from Dr. McGuire’s examples, you can use any twig that is hard and can have an end broken down into fibers, as long as it is nontoxic. I bought the book “The Tooth Trip,” at the Ravenna Co-op (health food store) in Seattle in 1979, and still have my original copy to this day. You can order used copies of this book on Amazon at reasonable prices and I recommend it highly. It is a great down to earth, easy to understand primer on natural tooth and mouth care.

Other plants/trees used for toothbrushes around the world include bay, eucalyptus, oak, neem, fir, and juniper. I am not sure I would use some of those, as I would not ingest eucalyptus, so brushing my teeth with it seems like a bad idea. Use common sense and wisdom. If you would not eat the plant, it is probably not a good idea to make it into a toothbrush! This reminds me of Dr. Bronner's Peppermint Soap and its label recommending one of its many uses as a toothpaste. I have tried that, and do not recommend it! The liquid peppermint soap foams in your mouth and tastes like soap, which is not pleasant at all.

In the following recipes, I use these abbreviations: t. = teaspoon, T. = Tablespoon, c. = cup

Chapter 3: Homemade Toothpaste/Powder Recipes

Eggplant Tooth Powder: In the wonderful book, "Living On The Earth," by Alicia Bay Laurel, from the same era, 1971, there is an unusual "Eggplant Tooth Powder" recipe. (This book is also now out-of-print and was one of my favorite books as a teen, in the 1970's. It is packed with useful information about how to live more naturally. Though now out of print, copies are still available at reasonable prices on Amazon.) The book's eggplant tooth powder recipe says to cut the insides of an eggplant into cubes, then wrap each cube in foil and put them into hot coals. After about 15 minutes, the eggplant will turn black and crumbly. If it turns white it is too done, throw it out. Take the black eggplant powder and mix with equal parts of sea salt. Store in jars. The book says, "Eggplant cures many gum diseases. Salt is also very good for the mouth." Leslie Tierra, herbalist, also recommends a preparation of the ash of eggplant, which she says will cure "any toothache, pyorrhea, and other mouth and gum disorders." And since we are told to gargle with salt water to help reduce infections in the mouth when injured or even when sick with a cold, it does make sense to use salt as a toothpaste as well. The only thing I wonder about with using straight salt as part of a toothpaste is it could burn sensitive areas and be a bit harsh for daily brushing, I think. Perhaps brushing with a tooth powder heavy in salt would be best just once or twice a week, is my own opinion.

Orange or Lemon Tooth Powder: 2 T. ground dried lemon and/or orange rind, 1/4 c. baking soda, 2 t. salt

Baking soda has long been used as a toothpowder. Grind rinds to a powder in a food processor, blender, or using a mortar and pestle. Add salt and soda and mix until it is all a fine powder. To use, pour some of the powder into the palm of your hand, rub the wet brush in the powder and brush. You can make the powder into paste by adding 1/4 t. hydrogen peroxide to 1 t. citrus tooth powder. If you add hydrogen peroxide, make sure not to swallow, as you would not drink hydrogen peroxide.

Golden Seal and Myrrh Healing Powder: You can make herbal brushing preparations to build the strength of your gums and teeth as well clean them. Mix equal parts of myrrh powder and golden seal powder and then brush teeth and gums with it. It tastes really icky and bitter, but it will help strengthen and heal your gums. I suggest only using this occasionally as these are strong bitter herbs, and do not swallow this. It won't kill you if you do, but I do not suggest eating myrrh, thus I do not suggest ingesting this.

Sage: You can rub sage leaves over your teeth to clean and whiten them.

Chapter 4: Homemade Mouthwashes

I usually make mouthwash in half week batches and keep it in the refrigerator for use. In the morning, when I go to brush my teeth, I just take a little cup of it with me to the sink from the refrigerator. (I also keep other homemade cosmetics in the refrigerator, such as hair tonics or facials, so will often grab those at the same time and bring them to the bathroom for morning rituals, all together in a little basket.)

Rosemary-Mint Mouthwash: Boil 2 and a half cups water, then take the water off the heat. Add 1 t. chopped fresh mint leaves, 1 t. chopped rosemary leaves, 1 t. anise seeds. Cover and let the herbs sit in the water for 20 minutes. Cool, strain, then use as a mouthwash. Place in the refrigerator to keep fresh. This is a minty, licorice flavored mouthwash with a bit of a pine scent from the rosemary.

Clove Mouthwash: You can make this spicy mouthwash by boiling a pint of water with 3 T cloves in it. Bruise the cloves by smashing them with the back of a spoon or knife, or slice them, so their essence can get into the water. Simmer, covered, for an hour, then cool, strain and use. (You can also add some sea salt for extra cleaning power.) Refrigerate to keep it fresh. This mouthwash has a wonderful taste that is unique and refreshing. Cloves are commonly used to treat tooth pain, and the Romans used them as breath fresheners. Oil of clove buds is a little milder than oil of the clove leaf, and is thus recommended for tooth pain. Clove is an antiseptic and antiviral and is used to help promote healing and cleanliness. Cloves also are aromatic and thus used in aromatherapy, such as for soothing baths. About half of all cloves grown are made into clove cigarettes manufactured and exported out of Indonesia.

Thyme Mouthwash: Thyme has traditionally been used throughout Europe to help cure colds and flus as it has healing properties. Those same properties are beneficial in a thyme mouthwash. Boil some water, take the water off the heat, throw some thyme into it and cover. Let it steep for 10-20 minutes, then strain/take the thyme out and use the thyme tea as a mouthwash. You can make it stronger by using more thyme and less water and/or by steeping it for longer periods. Refrigerate to keep fresh.

Lavender Mouthwash: The calming scent of lavender also makes a healing mouthwash. Boil water, remove from heat, then add lavender and steep, covered, for 10-20 minutes. You can add other herbs to this to make it more interesting, such as a lavender-chamomile, rose-lavender, rose-spearmint-lavender, lavender-orange or lavender clove combinations. Play around with flavors for different moods and seasons. You can make certain mouthwashes for the full moon, others for the new moon, or use a different herb each month. Some of my astrologer friends like to use

specific herbs during certain astrological cycles. The beauty of handmade oral hygiene products is you can vary them and experiment with a freedom not offered by commercial products.

Rose Mouthwash: When I was a child, my mom used to make a dessert she learned to make in India when she was a stewardess, using fresh rose petals. It was considered exotic in suburban Los Angeles in the 1960's to make this dessert out of edible flowers. But as I got older, I realized many foods are made using rose water and even rose petals, as well as other edible flowers. Rose water has a light scent and taste and is a wonderful base for a mouthwash. Alike the other mouthwash recipes, boil some water, take it off the heat, and then insert fresh or dried rose petals into the water, cover, and steep for 10-30 minutes. Remove the rose petals and use. This is a form of rose water, actually, but it makes a beautiful base for a mouthwash. It also is nice with other herbs added such as a rose-calendula mix, or rose-chamomile. Make sure to use organic rose petals, as most roses in gardens are laden with pesticides and not appropriate for edible uses. You can buy dried rose petals online or at local health food stores in their bulk bins or tea sections. The mouthwash will taste different when you use dried or fresh rose petals. Fresh petals have a fresher, lighter taste to them, while dried petals have a deeper taste. Refrigerate to keep fresh. You can also use the rose water in cooking, for things like lassis, marzipan, baklava, ice cream, etc., or as a facial toner before applying moisturizer. Lavender water in the recipe above can also be used in these ways. This rose water, when mixed with glycerin available at health food stores and pharmacies, makes a wonderful spray to use as a spritzer to moisturize skin.

Anise Mouthwash: Anise seeds make a licorice-flavored mouthwash that is good for your mouth. Boil water, take off of heat, steep some anise seeds in the water, covered, for 15-20 minutes, then strain the seeds out and use. Refrigerate for freshness. You can also add other herbs for combinations such as anise-lavender or anise-rose mouthwashes.

Calendula Mouthwash: Calendula, or marigold, is a great healing herb, for skin and mouths. It has a light pleasant taste, and can be used alone or mixed with other herbs, such as lavender, rose, clove, thyme, anise, etc., to make mouthwashes with different tastes for different days of the week! Like the others, boil water, remove from heat, add calendula and other herbs if using them, steep covered for 15-30 minutes, then strain and use the liquid as mouthwash. Refrigerate to keep fresh. Calendula flowers keep their spectacular bright orange and yellow colors when dried and thus make nice garlands. Thread a needle with regular thread and sew through dried marigolds to make a chain then hang the garland in your kitchen to brighten it up, while also using the flowers as you need them. You can make calendula oil by placing calendula flowers with an edible oil, such as almond or olive oil, in a jar, with a closed lid, and leaving it on a sunny windowsill. After about 2-3 weeks, take out the flowers and use the oil on your skin to help it heal. Calendula oil can be rubbed on sores inside the mouth and on sores outside the mouth, on lips as well, to help with healing. Refrigerate calendula oil to keep it fresh.

Chamomile Mouthwash: Chamomile is one of the mildest herbs, and is thus suited for children, and even babies. Chamomile has a distinctive flavor; it has a bit of a bitter dusty overtone and a flowery taste. It mixes well with stronger herbs, such as mint, to mask what some find to be a bit of a pungent taste. To make chamomile mouthwash, boil water, remove from heat, add flowers, cover and steep for 15-20 minutes. Strain and use. Keep in refrigerator for freshness. Lukewarm chamomile tea is often used in baby's bottles to help calm them down during teething, and is good for sensitive gums and mouth sores from dentures.

Myrrh and Golden Seal Mouthwash: You can infuse myrrh and golden seal powders into hot water to make a healing mouthwash. Boil water, take off heat, then add the powders and stir. Cover and let steep for 20 minutes. It will be bitter. These are strong healing herbs and I only recommend using this mouthwash now and then, using it more like a medicine. Keep in refrigerator. Do not swallow this as you would not eat myrrh, so I do not suggest ingesting it.

Hydrogen Peroxide Mouthwash: A hydrogen peroxide rinse can be made from equal parts of water and hydrogen peroxide. Swish the combination in the mouth then spit out. This will help with bleeding gums and mouth sores. Do not store mixture, make just enough to use each time. Make sure not to swallow this, as hydrogen peroxide is not healthy to ingest. This is not as good for younger persons due to the chance of swallowing it.

Blackberry Mouthwash: Fossil evidence shows humans have been eating blackberries since ancient times. In ancient times, people chewed blackberry leaves, or made tea out of boiled blackberry shoots, to relieve mouth ailments, cancer sores, and bleeding gums. It is suspected that the property that relieves the mouth ailments is probably the astringent quality of blackberry plants. Blackberry plants have been used medicinally, by American Indians to Greek doctors. In older times, blackberries were dried once picked, then pulverized into a powder, and stored as a medicine. The dried powder would be mixed with a little water and used to make a mouthwash when needed. Blackberries contain a high amount of Vitamin C, so they were also "prescribed" for scurvy in the past. Blackberry leaves are commonly used to make a healthy mouthwash. Pick organic blackberry leaves in spring, when the lighter, young leaves come out. Then dry the leaves by making a knot in a string and thumbtacking it to a corner wall. Next, pull the string across to the other wall of the corner and tack it up to make a drying line. Next, place the leaves on the string, hanging them using the v-shaped areas between leaves. Leave up until dry, then store in dry jar with lid. Make mouthwash by boiling water, removing it from heat, then add leaves, cover and steep for 20-30 minutes. Strain and use as mouthwash. You will notice that blackberry leaves are a common ingredient in many of Celestial Seasonings' commercial teas, and you, too, can use your dried leaves and young sprigs to make a sweet green tea. You can also add blackberry leaves in a cotton muslin bag to bath water to give the bath water a unique feeling and scent.

Lemon Balm Mouthwash: Lemon balm is thusly named due to its lemon scent and taste. Lemon balm can be added to other herbs such as peppermint to make a refreshing mouthwash, or it can be used alone. Boil water, take off heat and add lemon balm leaves, either fresh or dried, cover and steep 15-20 minutes. Strain and use as mouthwash. Keep refrigerated for freshness.

Chapter 5: Foods and Oral Health

Certain foods are known to help oral health. In the Source Family, we were told to eat the white parts inside the peel of oranges, and to eat and drink the juice of lots of oranges and grapefruits after dental surgery. I am told citrus foods are hostile to many bacteria, and their Vitamin C helps prevent infections. I followed this advice after several serious dental surgeries and it has always come out well. Herbal lore also says you can drink the herb oatstraw in a tea to help strengthen your teeth from your insides. One of my dentists in the past told me that eating carrots can strengthen teeth as well. Obviously, avoiding refined sugars, especially sodas and refined white sugar, is one of the easiest things to do to save your teeth via food. It is most often what you don't eat that matters most regarding saving your teeth, as opposed to what you do eat. Whole grains, whole foods, and fruits and vegetables in their natural states, are the best things for your teeth and oral health. The less refined and artificial foods eaten, the better your oral hygiene will be.

Chapter 6: Remedies

Cloves for Toothaches: Natural toothache remedies include the well-known use of clove to numb the area; you can soak gauze in the oil and put it in the area that is hurting. You can also rub a small amount of clove oil on the area that is hurting but be careful as clove oil is intense and can burn, so use caution and small amounts.

Acidophilus Rinse: Canker sores supposedly calm down when an acidophilus mouth rinse is used. I have not tried this but it does seem the acidophilus could have a cooling and neutralizing effect on a mouth sore.

The Toothache Tree: The Prickly Ash tree is also called "the toothache tree," because chewing on its leaves is supposed to help toothaches. I have not tried this and repeat it here only as folklore of interest on the topic.

Ginger: People have chewed on ginger root in the West Indies for toothaches.

But in all reality, the best toothache remedy is prevention, before the fact.

Thyme Cough Syrup for Sore Throats:

Nothing irritates a mouth worse than a raw cough in the back of the throat. To make an effective thyme cough syrup, start by making a tea. Boil 1 pint water, remove from heat, and add 4 ounces dried thyme and 1 ounce dried mint. Cover and steep for 20 minutes. Strain, then add a cup of honey or sugar to the tea water and stir. Heat again, slowly, over low heat, stirring constantly until syrup thickens. Cool. Pour into glass bottles with corks, as other tops can explode if syrup ferments. You can store this syrup in the refrigerator to extend life. Use a spoonful to help stop coughing when needed.

Thyme Gargle for Sore Throats:

This is another easy herbal remedy for flu season. Make a thyme gargle, by making a strong tea out of thyme, then sweeten it with a little honey, let cool, strain, then gargle with it often when you have a sore throat. You can also add sage and peppermint. (Do not use honey syrup for babies under one year old).

Chapter 7: Herb Suppliers

Mountain Rose Herbs:

Mountain Rose Herbs (www.mountainroseherbs.com) is an organic herb seller I have used for the last 12 years. Their products are high quality and can be ordered online. All of the materials mentioned in this book can be purchased from Mountain Rose Herbs, as well as things such as jars and containers.

Tenzing Momo:

Tenzing Momo (www.tenzingmomo.com) is a unique herb store in Seattle's Pike Place Market. I have been shopping for herbs at Tenzing Momo for the past 30 plus years and highly recommend them. They have a wide selection of traditional, as well as Chinese, herbs. Their staff is highly knowledgeable and you can order their products online.

Aura Cacia:

Aura Cacia (www.auracacia.com) has been providing high quality herbal essential oils for decades. They are my preferred essential oil supplier for the last 30 years and you can order online. Their site provides many recipes and educational information about medicinal uses of herbs and herbal oils.

Rosemary's Garden:

Rosemary's Garden (www.rosemarysgarden.com) offers a wide selection of herbs, as well as all supplies and other ingredients such as bees wax, glycerin, etc. to serve all your homemade cosmetics needs. I have ordered from them for the last 10 years. You can order online.

Artemisia Botanicals:

Artemisia Botanicals (www.artemisiabotanicals.com) offers a wide selection of herbs, oils, soaps, incense, and supplies, and you can order online.

Chapter 8: Commercial Oral Care Products I Recommend

Although there are no commercial toothpastes that I know of that lack ingredients that you and I would not put into our homemade tooth care products, many natural health care companies offer superior oral health products. I have worked in health food stores on and off since the 1970's thus I have had more exposure to natural health products than your average person and these are products I have used and recommend.

Desert Essence (www.desertessence.com) offers some nice oral care products including tea tree oil dental floss and toothpicks, but also tea tree oil toothpastes combined with others flavors such as mint, fennel and neem. My favorite commercial toothpaste is currently Desert Essence's Tea Tree Oil Ginger Toothpaste. I love its flavor and my mouth always feels very clean after using it. I also like their tea tree oil mouthwash, toothpicks, dental floss and hair products. I have been using Desert Essence's toothpastes since 1997, and highly recommend their products. No animal testing is used for these products.

Tom's of Maine (www.tomsofmaine.com) also offers a nice selection of oral care products including a wide selection of toothpastes, mouthwashes and dental floss. I particularly like their cinnamon clove toothpaste and their fennel (licorice flavored) toothpaste is also one of my favorites. They also offer alcohol-free mouthwashes, which is nice. I have been using Tom's toothpaste for 30 years now. Tom's uses no animal products or testing.

Vicco Ayurvedic Toothpaste (www.viccotoothpaste.com) is another healthy toothpaste I have been using for decades. It has a chalky, licorice taste, and used to be gray when most toothpastes were white, not sure what color it is nowadays, but it leaves your teeth white. This toothpaste is made with 20 herbs known to be beneficial to the mouth, teeth and gums and uses no animal products.

Archie McPhee (www.mcphee.com) offers the most bizarre assortment of oral health products available. Only here can you find dental floss in the following unusual flavors: dill pickle, banana, green salad, cupcake frosting, ranch dressing, coffee, bacon, and more. They also offer toothpicks in the following flavors: cotton candy, absinthe, maple, bacon and pickle. While there, you can also buy gag prop teeth! I have been shopping at this zany store in Seattle for the last 30 years and it is worth a visit to their store in person or online. You are guaranteed a laugh or two.

Nature's Gate (www.natures-gate.com) is also one of my longtime favorite companies for oral health products. They offer mint, anise (licorice) and cherry flavored toothpastes, and I also like their hair and skin products. I have used their products since the 1970's.

Chapter 9: Natural Oral Health Links

Susun Weed:

Susun Weed (www.susunseed.com) is my favorite herbalist. She provides informative online herbal forums where people talk about remedies, recipes, gardening tips, and all kinds of healthy wild women wisdom. I have published several articles with her ("Child Bearing and Mothering: Rogue Midwifery," Dec 2004, Weed Wanderings Herbal EZine by Susun Weed at http://susunweed.com/herbal_ezine/December04/pf_childbearing.htm and "Empower Yourself: Trees Are Healing the Earth," Nov. 2004, Weed Wanderings at http://www.susunweed.com/herbal_ezine/November04/empower.htm) and she seems to give the most practical information available regarding medicinal herbs. I highly recommend her books on herbs.

Rosemary Gladstar:

Rosemary Gladstar (www.sagemt.com) is another elder in the circle of women herbalists. I respect her work. She offers workshops on plant indentification and herbal home study courses, as well as books on the topics of herbalism.

The following recipes were collected by Kirsten Anderberg over a 30 year period. She makes no medicinal claims about these recipes and cautions people to make sure to know what herbs and plants you are dealing with before using them. The recipes and information provided in this book are for educational and historical purposes only. The recipes are based upon the author's individual experience and results may differ amongst individuals. Author takes no responsibility for individual use of said information. Please consult your doctor and health care professionals before using all herbal remedies.

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